l:Gurdon E-4, 5 (no date) 1907 AR7 Khasi AR7



and other trees. These are the sacred groves. Here the villagers worship *U ryngkew U basa*, the tutelary deity of the village. These groves are taboo, and it is an offence to cut trees therein for any purpose other than for performing funeral obsequies. The groves are generally not more than a few hundred yards away from the villages. The villages of the Syntengs are similar in character to those of the Khasis. The Wár villages nestle on the hill-sides of the southern border, and are to be seen peeping out from the green foliage with which the southern slopes are clad. In the vicinity of, and actually up to the houses, in the Wár villages, are to be observed large groves of areca-nut, often twined with the *pan* creeper, and of plantain trees, which much enhance the beauty of the scene. Looking at a Wár village from a distance, a darker shade of green is seen; this denotes the limits of the extensive groves where the justly celebrated Khasi orange is grown, which is the source of so much profit to these people. The houses in the Wár villages are generally closer together than those of the Khasis, probably owing to space being limited, and to the villages being located on the slopes of hills. Generally up the narrow village street, and from house to house, there are rough steep stone steps, the upper portion of a village being frequently situated at as high an elevation as 200 to 300 ft. above the lower. In a convenient spot in a Wár village a clear space is to be seen neatly swept and kept free from weeds, and surrounded with a stone wall, where the village tribunals sit, and the elders meet in solemn conclave. Dances also are held here on festive occasions. At Nongjri village there is a fine rubber tree, under whose hollow trunk there are certain sacred stones where the priest performs the village ceremonies.

The Bhoi and Lynngam villages are built in small clearings in the forest, the houses are close together and are built often in parallel lines, a fairly broad space being reserved between the lines of houses to serve as a street. One misses the pretty gardens of the Wár villages, for Bhois and Lynngams attempt nothing of the sort, probably because, unlike the Khasi, a Bhoi or Lynngam village never remains more than two or three years in one spot; generally the villages of these people are in the vicinity of the forest clearings, sometimes actually in the midst

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basket is covered tightly with a cloth so as to be air-tight, and it is allowed to remain in this condition for a couple of days, during which time the liquor has oozed out into the bowl. To make *ka'iad um* the material, the rice or millet from which the *ka'iad hiar* was brewed, is made use of. It is placed in a large earthen pot and allowed to remain there for about five days to ferment, after which the liquor is strained off. *Ka'iad hiar* is said to be stronger than *ka'iad um*. The former is used frequently by distillers of country spirit for mixing with the wort so as to set up fermentation. The people of the high plateaux generally prefer rice spirit, and the Wárs of the southern slopes of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills customarily partake of it also. The Khasis of the western hills, e.g. of the Nongstoin Siemship, and the Lynngams, Bhois, Lalungs, and Hadems almost invariably drink rice-beer, but the Syntengs, like the Khasi uplanders, drink rice-spirit. Rice-beer (*ka'iad um*) is a necessary article for practically all Khasi and Synteng religious ceremonies of importance, it being the custom for the officiating priest to pour out libations of liquor from a hollow gourd (*u klong*) to the gods on these occasions. As there is no Excise in the district, except within a five-mile radius of Shillong, liquor of both the above descriptions can be possessed and sold without restriction.

According to some Khasi traditions, the Khasis in ancient times used not to drink spirits, but confined themselves to rice-beer. It is only in the last couple of generations that the habit of drinking spirits has crept in, according to them. From Khasi accounts, the use of spirits is on the increase, but there is no means of testing these statements. There can be no doubt, however, that at the present time a very large amount of spirit is manufactured and consumed in the district. The spirit is distilled both for home consumption and for purposes of sale; in some villages, e.g. Mawlai and Marbisu, near Shillong, where there are fifty-nine and forty-nine stills respectively, there being a still almost in every house. Mawlai village supplies a great deal of the spirit which is drunk in Shillong, and from Marbisu spirit is carried for sale to various parts of the hills. Other large distilling centres are Cherrapunji, with forty-seven stills; Jowai, with thirty-one stills; Laitkynsew, with fifty-four stills;

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## MARRIAGE.

591 It is proposed in this section to consider marriage from its social side, the religious aspect thereof being reserved for another paragraph. The most remarkable feature of the Khasi marriage is that it is usual for the husband to live with his wife in his mother-in-law's house, and not for him to take his bride home, as is the case in other communities. This arrangement amongst the Khasis is no doubt due to the prevalence of the matriarchate. As long as the wife lives in her mother's house, all her earnings go to her mother, who expends them on the maintenance of the family. Amongst the Khasis, after one or two children are born, and if a married couple get on well together, the husband frequently removes his wife and family to a house of his own, and from the time the wife leaves her mother's house she and her husband pool their earnings, which are expended for the support of the family. Amongst 591 the Syntengs, however, and the people of Maoshai, the case 576 is different, for with them the husband does not go and live in his mother-in-law's house, he only visits her there. In Jowai some people admitted to me that the husband came to his mother-in-law's house only after dark, and that he did not eat, smoke, or even partake of betel-nut there, the idea being that because none of his earnings go to support this house, therefore it is not etiquette for him to partake of food or other refreshment there. If a Synteng house is visited, it is unusual to find the husbands of any of the married daughters there, although the sons of the family may be seen in the house when they have returned from work. Generally in the day-time you will find in a Synteng dwelling an old crone, who is the grandmother, or even the great-grandmother, of the family, also grandchildren or great-grandchildren; but the husbands of the 796 married daughters are not there. The Syntengs seem to have 611 more closely preserved the customs of the matriarchate than the Khasis, and the Syntengs claim that their *niam* or religious ceremonies are purer, i.e. that they more closely correspond to what they were in ancient times than those of the 589 Khasis. Amongst the Syntengs, occasionally, a widow is 765 allowed to keep her husband's bones after his death, on con-

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### INHERITANCE.

428 The Khasi and Synteng laws of inheritance are practically the same, although in some of the doloiships in the Jaintia Hills there are some slight differences. The Wár law of inheritance differs greatly from that of the Khasis, and the customs of the Bhois or Mikirs, who inhabit the Bhoi doloiship of the Jaintia Hills, are totally different from those of the Khasis, thereby supplying another link in the chain of evidence in support of the conclusion that the Bhois, or, more correctly speaking, the Mikirs, are of Bodo origin, and not Khasi or Mon-Anam. The Lynngams follow the Khasi law of inheritance. It will be convenient to describe the Khasi law first, and then to pass on to the special customs in vogue in the different doloiships in the Jaintia Hills, and, finally, to describe the Wár, Bhoi and Lynngam customs.

611 562 The Khasi saying is, "*long jaid na ka kynthei*" (from the woman sprang the clan). The Khasis, when reckoning descent, count from the mother only; they speak of a family of brothers and sisters, who are the great grandchildren of one great grandmother, as *shi kpoh*, which, being literally translated, is one womb, i.e. the issue of one womb. The man is nobody. If he is a brother, *u kur*, a brother being taken to mean an uterine brother, or a cousin-german, he will be lost to the family or clan directly he marries. If he be a husband, he is looked upon merely as *u shong kha*, a begetter. In some of the Wár villages a newly married man is spoken of by the bride's family as, "*u khun ki briew*," some one else's son. It is, 593 764 perhaps, somewhat of a paradox under the circumstances that wives should address their husbands as "*kynrad*," or lord. 611 There is, however, no gainsaying the fact that the husband, at least in theory, is a stranger in his wife's home, and it is certain that he can take no part in the rites and ceremonies of his wife's family, and that his ashes after death can find no place within the wife's family tomb, except, in certain cases, amongst 796 the Syntengs. Further, the ceremonial religion amongst Khasis, 562 especially that of the home, is in the hands of the women. It is, therefore, perhaps not to be wondered at, considering the 428 important status assigned to women by the Khasis, that women

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should inherit the property and not men. The rule amongst the Khasis is that the youngest daughter "holds" the religion, "*ka bat ka niam.*" Her house is called, "*ka iing seng,*" and it is here that the members of the family assemble to witness her performance of the family ceremonies. Hers is, therefore, the largest share of the family property, because it is she whose duty it is to perform the family ceremonies, and propitiate the family ancestors. The other daughters, however, on their mother's death are entitled, each of them, to a share of their mother's property, although the youngest daughter gets the lion's share, e.g. the family jewellery, and the family house, and the greater part of what it contains. The youngest daughter cannot dispose of the house without the unanimous consent of her sisters. If the youngest daughter dies, she is succeeded by the next youngest daughter, and so on. All the daughters are bound to repair the house of the youngest daughter free of cost. In the event of the youngest daughter changing her religion, or committing an act of *sang*, or taboo, she loses her position in the family, and is succeeded by her next youngest sister, as in the case of a death. Failing daughters, inheritance would pass by the "knight's move" to the sister's youngest daughter, who would be succeeded by her youngest daughter, and so on. Failing sister's daughters succession would revert to the mother's sisters and their female descendants. In the Jaintia Hills the inheritance of all real property passes from mother to youngest daughter. No man in the uplands of the Jaintia Hills can possess landed property, unless it is self-acquired property. In the Jaintia Hills, if a man dies and leaves acquired property, his heir will be his mother, if alive, excluding wife, sons, and daughters. If the wife, however, undertakes not to re-marry, she will inherit half of her husband's property, which at her death will descend to her youngest daughter by him.

Amongst Khasis all property which has been acquired by a man before marriage is considered to belong to his mother; indeed it may be said to belong to the man's *kur*, or clan, such property being called by Khasis, "*ka mai iing kur*" (the earnings of the house of the clan). After marriage, if there are children, the case is different, provided that the property

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which a figure, evidently of a Hindu god, has been carved, without doubt after the erection of the stone. Here we have a striking parallel case to the painted and carved menhir near Tregastel in Brittany, upon which has been carved the representation of a crucifix. There are also some carved stones near Nartiang (said to represent two women) called *mawthawdur briew*.

The Khasis say that these great stones were brought sometimes from considerable distances. After being hewn, the stones were laid on a large, wooden trolley and dragged across country by means of ropes of cane, of which plenty can be had from the Wár country on the southern side of the district, and then placed in position by means of ropes and levers. It seems little short of marvellous that these stones, which sometimes weighed many tons, were placed in position by such primitive means, especially when we consider the great trouble there was to re-erect one of the fallen stones at Stonehenge lately. Nowadays only comparatively small stones are erected, which are generally hewn and erected on the spot, so that there is no necessity for any conveyance.

In conclusion, it may be remarked that the subject of the Khasi monoliths is in reality a large one, on which a great deal could be written, but owing to considerations of space it has been found necessary to compress the account within its present limits.

## FESTIVITIES, DOMESTIC AND TRIBAL.

Dancing forms the principal part of all the Khasi festivities, and is an important adjunct of some of their religious ceremonies. One of the greatest festivals in the Khasi Hills is the Nongkrem dance; it may be said to be as important an event to the Khasis as the *Bch dieng-khlam* festivities are to the Syntengs.

The Nongkrem dance is really part of what is known as the *pom-blang*, or goat-killing ceremony, performed by the Siem of Khyrim (or Nongkrem) with the aid of his *soh-blei* (high priest) and the various *lyngdohs* (or priests) to Ka Blei Synshar (the ruling goddess), that the crops may prosper and that there may

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be a successful era in store for the people of the State. The goddess on this occasion may be regarded as a Khasi Demeter, although no mysteries form part of her services as at the Grecian Eleusis. The Nongkrem ceremony and dance (now held at Smit) take place in the late spring, generally in the month of May. A lucky day having been fixed, the Siem sends a ring of cane (*kyrwoh*) by way of a summons to the people of every village in the State, at the same time informing them of the date of the puja, and requesting them to attend with their offerings, consisting of goats and different articles of food. In the meantime various pujas have been taking place in the house of *Ka Siem Sad*, the Siem priestess, which it would be tedious to describe in detail. The more interesting points only will be mentioned. A fortnight before the puja and dance at Smit the *soh-blei*, or high priest, pours out libations of liquor in the *kyram-blang*, or place where the sacrificial goats are kept, and in front of the great post (of *dieng sning*, or Khasi oak), in the house of the Siem priestess. Dancing then takes place in front of the post. Later on the Siem, with the high priest and other attendant priests, walks with extremely slow gait to a small hill where a stone altar has been prepared, and sacrifices a cock in honour of *u'lei Shillong*, or the god of the Shillong Peak. A silver dish with powdered rice, liquor in a gourd (*ka'iad um*), betel-nut, and some leaves of the Khasi oak (*dieng sning*), are also necessary adjuncts of the puja. A goat is then sacrificed, and the sacrifice is followed by a dance of twenty-two men armed with swords and shields and chowries (fly-flaps). Having danced before the altar, the party returns to the house of the Siem priestess and executes another dance in the great courtyard. The Siem and certain selected persons dance in front of the *rishot blei*, or holy post of Khasi oak inside the house of the Siem priestess, the dancers being entertained with dried fish and ginger. Then follows the great dance of girls and men in front of her house. The girls dance in the centre, taking such tiny steps, that the lifting of their feet from the ground is hardly perceptible, the arms held down to the sides and the eyes demurely downcast. It is on this occasion that they wear the peculiar silver (and sometimes gold) crowns illustrated in the

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plate. The hair is worn tied in a knot behind the head, but with a long tail hanging down the back. Rich silk cloths are worn by the girls, who present the appearance of being, if anything, over-clothed, or, as Yule aptly puts it, of "perfect parallelograms." They wear a profusion of gold and coral bead necklaces, silver and gold chains, bracelets, ear-rings of gold, and any other jewellery they can lay hands on. Not only is the whole of the family jewellery requisitioned by the fair *débutante* (it is only the unmarried girls who dance), but she borrows from her friends. The men dance round the outside of the circle, waving fly-flaps and prancing (often nowadays wearing huge boots) with ungainly strides. The music necessary for the dance consists of *tangmuri* (pipes), drums, and cymbals. This is *ka shad kynthei*, or the dance of the women. Then there is *ka shad mastieh*, or the dance of the men, who are gaily dressed, wearing plumes of black and white cock's feathers (*u thaiyah*) and hold swords and shields. After gyrating for some time, two men at a time rapidly approach one another and clash their swords together in mock combat. They then retire, and, after again revolving for a period, repeat the process; then other couples follow and take their place. This goes on until the dancers get tired or are told to stop.

The above description may be taken as applicable to all the Khasi dances. Dancing forms part of the ceremony of placing the ashes in the sepulchre of the clan. Dancing also forms a part of certain ceremonies performed at markets for the prosperity of the State and for the good of trade.

When I was at Mawsynram, at the time of the appointment of a Siem, I witnessed a very pretty dance called *ka shad lymmoh*, performed by men who held the leafy branches of trees in their hands. This is most effective. Then followed a dance of some forty young girls, very well dressed, covered with the usual gold and coral beads and silver chains, and wearing the silver crown, or *pansngiat*. The young women danced with great spirit, and with an absence of all shyness, but still with the greatest decorum. Many of the women, spectators as well as dancers, were observed to be without the usual *tap moh khlih*, or head-cloth, the absence of which is always a sign amongst the Khasi women of merry-making. There were

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women from the War country, wearing their picturesque dress, amongst whom was the wife of the Siem of Bohwal with her little daughter. The dance was a pretty sight, and I have seldom seen such evidence of unaffected happiness as was exhibited by the people on this occasion. Dancing may be described as one of the characteristic features of Khasi life.

The Synteng *Beh-dieng-khlam* festival takes place annually at Jowai and elsewhere in the Jaintia Hills in the deep water moon month (= *Jyllieu*, or June). *Khlam* is the Khasi word for plague or pestilence, and *beh-dieng* signifies to drive away with sticks. The festival may be described as follows:—The males rise betimes on the day fixed and beat the roof with sticks, calling upon the plague-demon to leave the house. Having done this, later on in the day they go down to the stream where the goddess "Aitan" dwells. Then poles of great length, which have been newly cut, are held across the stream. The people jump on the poles and try to break them; when they succeed in doing so, a great shout is given. After all these poles have been broken, a very large pole is fixed across the stream. The people then divide themselves into two parties, and contend for the possession of the tree. The contest, however, is a good-humoured one, and although many buffets are given and received, these are not regarded seriously, and there are seldom any fights. Col. Bivar says the contending villagers, in their excitement, sometimes relapse into a state of almost complete nudity. The party which succeeds in obtaining possession of this post is supposed to gain health and prosperity during the coming year. Col. Bivar remarks that the origin of this so-called ceremony is said to be that the god of thunder, "*u'lei pyrthat*," and Ka Aitan, the goddess of the stream, enjoined its performance. Many innovations, however, have crept in. People disguise themselves as giants and wild beasts, they also parade images of serpents, elephants, tigers, peacocks, &c. Dancing is carried on with enthusiasm by the males, the girls, clad in their best attire, remaining on-lookers. Before the meeting breaks up the males play a sort of game of hockey with wooden balls.

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582 marry any one belonging to your own *kur*, or clan. Unlike the
614 Khasis, however, a Lyngam can marry two sisters at a time.
595 The Lyngam marriages are arranged by *briengs*, or go-betweens,
591 much in the same way as Khasi marriages; but the ritual
582 observed is less elaborate, and shows a mixture of Khasi and Garo customs (see Section III.). The Lyngams intermarry
583 with the Garos. It appears that sometimes the parents of girls exact bride-money, and marriages by capture have been heard of. Both of these customs are more characteristic of the Bodo
849 tribes of the plains than of the Khasis. There are no special birth
782 customs, as with the Khasis, except that when the umbilical cord
553 falls a fowl is sacrificed, and the child is brought outside the house. Children are named without any special ceremony.
764 The death customs of the Lyngams have been described in Section III. A peculiar characteristic is the keeping of the dead body in the house for days, sometimes even for several months, before it is buried. The putrefying corpse inside the house seems to cause these people no inconvenience, for whilst it remains there, they eat, carry on their ordinary avocations, and sleep there, regardless of what would be
771 considered by others an intolerable nuisance. The religion of these people consists of a mixture of ancestor-worship and the propitiation of the spirits of fell and fall, which are, most of them, believed to be of evil influence, as is the case with other savage
776 races. As with the people of Nongstoin, the primeval
782 ancestress, "*Ka Iaw kei*," is worshipped for the welfare of the clan, a cow being sacrificed to her, with a gourd of rice-beer, and leaves of the oak, or *diengsning* tree. The leaves of the oak are afterwards hung up inside the house, together with the jaw-bone of the pig. Sacrifices are offered to a forest demon, *U Basajiang* (a god who brings illness), by the roadside; also to *Ka Miang Bylli U Majgamo*, the god of cultivation, at seed time, on the path to the forest clearing where the seed is sown. Models of paddy store-houses, baskets and agricultural implements are made, sand being used to indicate the grain. These are placed by the roadside, the skulls of the sacrificial animals and the feathers of fowls being hung up on bamboos about the place
793 where the sacrifice has been performed. There are no priests or
796 *lyngdoh*, the fathers of the hamlet performing the various cere-

776 Then the wings of his nose are cut with a shear,
782 or pincer of silver and the blood is drained off. In the same way the nails on the hands and feet are cut off with silver shears. Finally the dead body is thrown into an abyss. (5)

[113] 5. For further details about "Human Sacrifice Among the Khasi", see Dr. P. C. Becker, Salvatorianische Mitteilungen [Salvatorian Communications], 1909, No. 5, pp. 75 ff.

784 [114] Since on the one hand many Khasi are busy
792 trying to kill others with the help of the devil or to make them sick (ai-ksuid), and on the other hand the evil spirits also harm men without being called upon, an enormous fear is thus the fruit of this superstition. From this fear comes the desire to make oneself free from the influence of evil spirits (lait-ksuid) or to modify this influence by sacrifices (khad) or at least to propitiate the devil completely (khein-ban khai).

• 796 Therefore the Synteng annually hold a large
[792] feast for driving away cholera (ka behdiengkhlam). The offered sacrifices have the purpose or propitiating the feared demoness ka khlam but at the same time they also have the purpose of making the participants in the sacrifice safe against cholera (to enchant them). Gurdon (6)

6. Gurdon, The Khasis.

describes this feast as follows: "In the month of June when the river is full of water, on a certain day the men go in the morning in front of the huts and strike the roofs of the huts with sticks. At the same time they call on the demoness ka khlam continuously and challenge her to leave

the house concerned. Then they go slowly down to the river. Large poles, which were set out the day before, are now placed on the river. The people jump onto the poles and try to break them. If this happens a general great shout of joy sounds forth. If all the poles are broken, they fetch a particularly strong pole, actually a beam, and place it over the river. The people now divide up into two halves, and a battle begins for the possession of this beam. But the fight is a friendly one and even though there are many blows and even wounds, the people do not engage in a serious fight, even though they battle and struggle for the possession of the beam so hard that many lose all their clothes. The side which has the luck of winning possession of the beam will be healthy (free of cholera) and well for the coming year according to the belief of the people.

The use of charcoal also borders on magic. Thus P.V. Kartte, Apostolic Missionary, S.D.S. writes: (7) If a mother has a long journey to

[113] 7. Kartte, Die Religion der heidnischen Khasi [The Religion of the Heathen Khasi], Apostelkalender, 1895. [Apostle Calendar]

make, she makes a black mark with charcoal on the forehead of her child to protect it from any harm. Then she takes a longish piece of wood, splits it at one end into four parts, and puts the piece of charcoal in between. The mother carries this in her hand on the journey.

The same missionary also reports the doings of the Khasi during an eclipse of the moon: "If there is an eclipse of the moon, the Khasi believe that a frog is with the moon and is eating it up. The Khasi like the moon very much, and in order to prevent the frog from eating up the

782 and can now also appear at the public state and
793 community sacrifices when any basis of relationship justifies it.

This ceremonial way of introducing lyngdohs is still the custom especially in the kingdoms of Kyrim and Nongkrem.

The number of active, official lyngdohs varies according to the region. A kingdom has at least one official lyngdoh. [Fig. 4. Egg throwing: Throwing of the egg.] [Fig. 5. Egg throwing: Investigation] But the kingdom
• [796] of Nongkrem, for example, has six official lyngdohs, who together with the king and with other lyngdohs from neighboring villages annually offer the great state sacrifice. (8) Even

8. P. Dr. Becker, S.D.S., "Die Nongkrempuja in den Khasibergen" [The Nongkrem Puja in the Khasi; Mountains], Anthropos, Vol. 4, (1909), p. 898.

villages often have their own official lyngdohs.

For the services which they perform for the people by offering sacrifices, they do not receive money or a present of money. Usually their trouble is rewarded by natural products, such as a hen, a bottle of rice liquor or even, though more rarely, by a pig. Obviously they always have the right to participate in the sacrificial meal.

## 2. The Sacrifices.

### a) State Sacrifices.

161 According to the report of the last census
722 the tribe of Khasi numbers about 200,000 people.
621 (9) These are not unified under one ruler, but

9. P. Dr. C. Becker, S.D.S. Im

161

Stromtal des Brahmaputra [In the Valley of the Brahmaputra], (Aachen: Xaverius Publishing House, 1923) p. 293.

782 621 are divided into 10 kingdoms and 15 small states (communities). In each of these kingdoms and communities an official state sacrifice is of- 782 fered each year. The smaller state units offer 776 it to the u basa shnong or to the u phan u 796 kyrpad (the tutelary god of a village), the larger one to the u 'lei Shillong (the god who has commanded the sacrifice) [218]. The purpose of this large sacrifice is to thank the revered god for the country (kingdom or community) and to beg him to make its inhabitants 782 healthy and happy. This is shown by the prayers 796 spoken at these sacrifices, namely: "O god Shillong! for thee is this prayer, this sacrifice of goat, of hen, of kpu and rynsi (a kind of bread of rice meal or cornmeal with pounded sugar), of utensils of preparation, as thou hast given them to the royal lineage, so that once in every year Puja is celebrated in thy name, so that we may live happily, be healthy and increase, so that kings will arise, so that their honor and that of the kingdom will grow and increase and the children of the kingdom will spread out to increase thy name and thy honor." (10)

10. P. Dr. C. Becker, S.D.S., "Die Nongkrempuja in den Khasibergen" [The Nongkrem Puja in the Khasi Mountains], Anthropos Vol. 4, 1909, p. 901.

In another prayer they say: "O lord, thou who hast created heaven and earth, thou hast placed a king that we may be children of his

782 kingdom, thou hast given the sun and the moon,
796 for reckoning the year, so that we may have Puja once in the year, so that kings may arise, the children of the valleys may increase and thrive, the children of the Khasi, the children of the Bhoi, the children of the War, so that the sacrificial gifts may increase before the face of thine altar." (11)

11. P. Dr. Becker, S.D.S., loc. cit., p. 902 (Anthropos).

782 At these state and community sacrifices, the
793 official lyngdohs are the chief one to appear,
622 who together with the ruling king or chieftain
796 and with other lyngdohs from the villages perform the sacrifices. These annual state sacrifices are introduced and performed with great ceremony. They take place in front of the house of the s' iem sad (high priestess) of the state involved. (Fig. 2) [Fig. 6. The village chief in his sacrificial coat and ornaments]*

782 In addition to the usual sacrificial gifts,
796 which are grouped together on a small altar of earth and which consist of a banana leaf, betel nut leaves, pepper leaves, betel nuts, kpu and rynsi, fermented rice water in a gourd bottle, and oak leaves, there are chiefly hens and goats and at the end a pig. Goats are slaughtered in great numbers, so that the chief festival day of the state sacrifice is called pom blang (the goat heads) by the people.

782 Besides the slaughtering of the sacrificial
535 animals, the dance plays a chief part. At these
796 great sacrifices all the dances that are customary among the Khasi are performed: the dance [219] of the unmarried girls, the dance of the girls and men together, but both sexes are so placed that the men form an outer circle and the girls

*[See category 116, p. 17--Analyst]

782 an inner circle; the dance of the men with
535 torches; the sword dance of the men; the shield
•796 dance of the men; the dance of the men in couples; the solo dance of a girl and the solo dance of a man.

All the inhabitants of the kingdom combine for the state sacrifice. With the cheerfulness peculiar to the Khasi they watch the passage of the individual sacrifices and the dances for hours at a time. In the evening of the day of the chief festival a sacrifical meal is held, in which all the sacrificers, dancers, and spectators may participate.

782

b) Private Sacrifices.

In addition to the annual large state sacrifices, other sacrifices are also offered by the Khasi. These are the usual sacrifices which arise from the needs of daily life. The following can be mentioned as such:

1. The sacrifice for questioning spirits.
2. The sacrifice at the name giving.
3. The sacrifice before every important business, for example, before the market, before planting rice, before shooting arrows, before building a hut, before a journey, etc.
4. The sacrifice of thanks after recovering health.
5. The sacrifice in cases of sickness.
6. The sacrifice at the time of death.
7. Khein Ksuid (the sacrifice for finding out which spirits must be propitiated. This is a matter of finding out past errors of those already dead).
8. The sacrifice at a cremation.
9. The sacrifice at the burial of bones:

/892/ The Nongkrem Puja in the Khasi Mountains (Assam) (1)

126 1. All the pictures attached to this article are prepared from photographs taken by P. Frumentius Stegmiller, S.D.S., missionary in Shillong. The photographs were in part very difficult to take as they had to be made without being observed and in some cases the day was already well advanced.

by P. Dr. C. Becker, S.D.S., Apostolic Prefect of Assam.

631 About five English miles to the east of Shillong, the chief town of the Khasi Mountains, lies the town of Nongkrem. It is the seat of the king ( u S'iem) who governs the state Nongkrem of Khyrim, the largest of the 25 Khasi little states and which is partly independent (semi-independent) of the English government. Nongkrem is best 796 782 known for the great sacrifice, simply called Nongkrem Puja or also ka Pom blang-u-S'iem Nongkrem (Slaying the goat of the S'iem of Nongkrem) which takes place there annually. This festivity offers, as little else does, an instructive insight into the religious and social views and customs of this interesting mountain people and should therefore be given a concise description, which may be divided into three parts:

I. The Preparations for the Sacrificial Feast.

II. The Sacrificial Feast.

III. The Celebration that Follows.

I. The Preparations for the Sacrificial Feast

793 643 Just as matriarchy prevails in the family among the Khasi so a similar arrangement has been kept in the management of the Khasi state, Nongkrem. In the state the S'iem is not the actual head but a high priestess, called ka S'iem sād. Sād means the divinity which watches over the royal races. The temporal government is transferred by the S'iem sād to the S'iem; he acts as her authorized agent although independent in his decisions, working with his advisers, whose advice he must obtain in matters of importance. The moneys of the kingdom

are kept by the S'iem sād. Everything that comes in, such as taxes, market contributions, or that which comes in through the administration of justice must be given to her. She may dispose of it as she sees best, while the S'iem receives from her the money necessary for paying the costs of the government. 793 643

The S'iem sād is the sole authority in matters of religion. She must watch over the religious sacrifices and determine the time and place for them; /facing p. 892 Fig. 1.[1] The Sacrifice (Nongkrem Puja) among the Khasi/ /893/ the state sacrifices are held in her house or in front of her house, and they must be performed in her presence. The actual S'iam is her son or nephew or even more distant male relative, who is chosen by the "state council," the Mentris.

After the death of the S'iem sād, this office passes to her oldest living daughter, and lacking such to the eldest daughter of her eldest daughter, and lacking such granddaughters to the oldest daughter, and so forth. In case there are no daughters or granddaughters, the oldest living sister takes the office; if there are no sisters, then the oldest daughter of the oldest sister of the mother of the deceased S'iem sād is the successor, and so it goes further. In this way the office always remains within the royal lineage.

In the house of the S'iem sād (called ka-iīng sād), which is one of the largest and most attractive in the Khasi Hills, there is a post in the middle which reaches from the floor to the ridge of the roof. It is called u rishot Blei (post, pillar of god) and serves at the same time as the altar before which many sacrifices are performed. The pillar is nothing other than the trunk of the Khasi oak (ka dieng sning; botanical name: castanopsis sp.), which is holy to the Khasi. If the house of the S'iem sād burns down, or if it is built up anew, a new pillar must be brought. Only certain families (jaid) have the privilege of cutting down the trees for this purpose. As soon as it is cut down, dancing and music begins; the trunk is covered with a cloth and carried away on a carrying frame. Hundreds of persons participate in this. As long as the pillar is not set up, it is guarded night and day. A person or an animal might jump over it and that would be sang (=, taboo): the trunk would be defiled and another tree would have to be cut down. If something dreadful happens in the kingdom, or if a danger threatens, the S'iem sād goes with six official sacrificial priests of the kingdom Nongkrem before the post and offers sacrifice there in order to avert the evil. 778 782 796 [824]

The foregoing has to be mentioned in order to give a better understanding of the following.

The Nongkrem Puja usually takes place in the month of May. 796 782

[1] [see category 116, p. 14 - - - Analyst]

782 One month before the celebration rice liquor is poured into a hollowed
796 out gourd bottle in the house of the S'iem sad and offered before the rishot Blei as a 'suit' (sacrifice of drink). This is done in order to inform the u Suidnia long S'iem (the spirit of the first great-uncle on the maternal side who was the first king), the ka Blei long S'iem (the divinity who makes kings kings) and the u Blei Shillong (the god Shillong), that preparations are now being made for the Puja and that they might help with them.

776 The u Blei Shillong plays the chief part in the whole ceremony. He enjoys great reverence among the Khasi, especially in the kingdom Nongkrem and Nylliem. Not far from Nongkrem a mountain
[133] peak rises 6,450 feet above the sea. It is the highest peak in the Khasi Mountains, its name is "Shillong Peak." Here is the seat of
[773] the god Shillong. The story goes that a man appeared here once, who said he /894/ had not been born but came of himself (shu long). He also told the people that they would receive the kings, S'iem. So the god who lives here was called u Shu long (he who is out of him-
[103] self), from which the Europeans gradually made the word Shillong and also gave this name to the splendid mountain station in the heart of the Khasi Mountains.

796 After the S'iem sad has determined exactly the day of the cere-
782 monies, the news of this is sent out two weeks prior to the ceremony to the village elders (Rangbah shnong). This is done on the day of the large market (jeu duh), which takes place every eighth day. Two weeks after is the pom blang, also on the day of the large market, which is discussed below.

The way in which the invitation is issued is interesting. A num-
[214] ber of chains about an ell long are made of bamboo rings. These are called kyrwoh. One of these is sent to the oldest man of each village. Since the Khasi formerly had no script, this bamboo chain always served as a sign of invitation or summons to the S'iem for ceremonies, or of danger of war, or of court matters and such. The degree of urgency was shown by the form of the links; in the case of great haste the form was longish and flat, otherwise correspondingly rounder. The sending of the kyrwoh to the village elders serves now as a sign of invitation for the whole village to appear at the ceremonies and at the same time as a demand to gather together the prescribed sacri-
[651] ficial gifts. Each of the six districts, into which the kingdom Nongkrem is divided, must furnish a goat; each individual hut must pay a tax (called pynshok) of one rupee and four annas in addition. Very poor people only have to pay one anna or even only a half. The sacrificial gifts, such as rice, various sacrificial animals, fish, brandy

and such are bought with these contributions; the balance, as with other money, is handed over to the S'iem sād for management. 796 782

Until the approach of the actual festival, the fish sacrifice (suit-dohkha) takes places on the day called jeu pomthiah, on which all who appear are fed with dried fish and brandy. This is supposed to be a further announcement to the u Blei Shillong, u Suidnia long Siem and ka Blei long S'iem of the imminent Puja. Twelve different kinds of drums (ksing) are beaten. 796 782

Then the drum, ksing shad tyngkoh, is beaten three times, and the first sacrificial priest (Soh Blei) and a flute player dance. The dance, tyngkoh, will be described in more detail below. After it is finished, the ksing kynthei (women drums) have a turn, to the sound of which the S'iem and the flute player (duhalia) dance three times. Usually only women dance to this drum. About the method of dancing it is sufficient to remark that in a Khasi dance the dancing persons do not touch each other, and each carries out the motions independent of the others. After the women drums are beaten, then the sword dance drum (ksing mastieh) and the large drum (nakra) are beaten. Torches are carried around and shouts of joy uttered nine times. Various drums, flute music, and clashes of cymbals follow, while dancing takes place. /facing p. 894: (A) Fig. 2.[1] Drums, flutes and cymbals of the Khasi. Fig. 3 Sacrificial knives and ka wait of the Khasi. Phot. P. Frum. Stegmiller S. D. S. Fig. 4. Sacrificial dress of the Soh Blei (Khasi). Phot. P. Frum. Stegmiller, S. D. S. / /facing p. 894: (B) Fig. 10 (sic?). Khasi ornaments. Phot. P. Fru. Stegmiller, S. D. S. / /895/ At the end the S'iem dances alone, while the drums and flutes are not silent the whole night through. Fig. 2 shows several Khasi drums, a flute, and cymbals which are never missing from a dance. 534 535

The day of the large market, on which the actual ceremony begins, approaches meanwhile. On the day before -- ka sngi umni -- the roads are swept and the place for the sacrifice of the goat put in order. As a sign of joy as to what will happen, drums are beaten again and flutes (tangmuri) played. In front of the house of the S'iem sād, the S'iem and other men perform a sword dance. Although interesting, this dance is not very artistic. Hopping and skipping from one foot to the other, the men, one behind the other, move slowly in a circle on the open place. (cf. Fig. 6).[1] They hold a bunch of goat hair in one hand and a sword in the other. A shout of joy is uttered from time to time, then they stop again, jump at each other two by two, and hit each other with quick blows of their swords. Each one quickly draws back again and moves in a circle again as before. In this way the dance continues.

[1] [for illustrations see category 11k, pp. 14–18 --- Analyst]

796 this way the dance continues.
782 After it has become dark a hen is sacrificed in front of the house of the S'iem sād: to the ka S'iem synshar (the queen who rules [172] the world) and to the Biskurom, the god who instructs in the playing of flutes and other instruments. Then various drums are beaten.

Then everyone goes inside the iing sād. The S'iem sād hands the Soh Blei, the first sacrificial priest, who is from the family (jaid) Rumnong, a hollowed-out gourd bottle (u skaw) with rice liquor. The Soh Blei pours out the contents in front of the rishot Blei in honor of the goddess of the markets (ka Blei jeu lei hat) so that the markets will be good, remunerative, and successful; so that the roads will be good and safe and everything will be blessed; so that the kingdom itself will progress and develop. It must be remembered here that the [447] market system is very marked among the Khasi and is the chief source of their income. After this 'suit' the same sacrificial drink is offered to the Ka Blei long S'iem, in order to receive her blessings, so that the kings will be good and may make progress. Music and dancing then lasts until daybreak.

II. The Sacrificial Feast

The actual ceremony begins on the day of the large market. This day itself is called pom blang (goat heads). The S'iem sād may not eat rice for three days, only a kind of bread, which is made from rice flour. On the large open place in front of the iing sād the men hold their sword dance (shad wait) and guns are shot off until the S'iem sād, the S'iem and the Rangbah (elders) come out of the iing sād. Following the S'iem sād, is her slave-girl (mrau), who carries the utensils and sacrificial gifts. These are arranged by the S'iem sād herself and consist of a banana leaf, of which however only the upper part is taken (ka sla kait), five betel nut leaves (tympew), five portions of betel nuts, as much as is usually put in the mouth at one time (kwai) /896/, a kind of bread made of rice flour (kpu), for which the rice is first put in water, then taken out, dried, and pounded into flour; then rynsi bread, which is also baked with pounded rice or corn, mixed with sugar and rolled into the shape of bullets; some uncooked, shelled rice (u khaw), a gourd bottle with rice liquor (u klong) and several leaves of the Khasi oak tree. The following utensils are used: a golden or silver water container (u luta), a silver dishlike plate (ka pliang rupa). All these are now given by the S'iem sād to the Soh Blei and in addition a rooster and a white he-goat are brought to the place of sacrifice.

The spectators now go to the side, the S'iem and the Rangbahs come down to the place of sacrifice, while the Soh Blei receives the utensils and the sacrificial gifts and spreads them out in order on the ground. Then he takes the rooster in both hands and calls on the god Shillong with these words; "O god Shillong, thou who hast been seated since time immemorial! (ko Blei Shillong kumba la buh u long shwa!)" With a deep bow he then offers the sacrifice five times. Rooster and goat are sprinkled with water, rice, and the flour from kpu and rynsi, and are then beheaded. Then the examination of the entrails (dykhot) takes place in order to see if the sacrifice was acceptable. The way of doing that will be given below.

After the end of the sacrifice the Soh Blei and a flute player lead the sword dance; after them the S'iem and the other dancers follow in turn. Various drums are beaten alternately and flutes are played through the whole night. When night falls the goats of the S'iem and those of the various districts of the kingdom of Nongkrem are brought for the sacrifice of the next day.

The day following the great market is called ka sngi Lyngka. It is the center point and climax of the whole ceremony. From early in the morning the crowds pour in from all sides of the Khasi Mountains.

Early in the morning an unmarried girl of the royal lineage (ka S'iem ba dang khynraw) dances in the house of the S'iem sād before the rishot Blei. Usually a granddaughter or nearer relative of the S'iem sād is chosen for this. Two men then take the girl in their arms and carry her with a rocking motion to the large open place in front of the iing sād.

Then the great folk dance begins. In the middle of the place musicians squat on the ground and play the drums and flutes, and strike the cymbals. The music is quite without art, only a repetition of the same monotonous tones.

The women dancers move in a rather narrow circle around the musicians. Only the unmarried girls dance. The clothes they wear for it are very rich and frequently very valuable. Fine cloths, usually of red, yellow, or blue silk are draped over their bodies; the upper body and arms are covered by a satin jacket. Their hair is bound together in a bun behind their heads; a string hangs /facing p. 896. Fig. 5: Khasi Men Dancers in front of the iing sād. Phot. P. Frum. Stegmiller, S. D. S. Fig. 6. Sword Dance of the Khasi. Fig. 7. S'iem sād and S'iem of Nongkrem. / /897/ down from the bun which usually ends in three tassels. The head is covered by a golden or silver crown of fine chased work, which is topped by a bunch of feathers or a bunch of artificial flowers. Around their necks they wear chains of gold or

[For illustrations, see category 116, p.116 --- Analy:]

Thus the dance continues for hours at a time amidst the noise of the music. Thousands of spectators who do not seem to get tired throng around the great place. In the afternoon, at about three o'-clock /898/ the dance, which plays a large part in all the religious festivities is ended. 535

Then preparations are made for the large sacrifice. In front of the house of the S'iem sād several boards are placed in a row beside each other, and in front of them at certain intervals twelve little heaps of loam are made. Music now plays inside of the iīng sād. All the sacrificial gifts are given to the S'iem sād in front of the rishot Blei and then distributed to the sacrificers by her. These then go out of the hut to the place of the sacrifice. There are twelve of them, namely the six official sacrificial priests of the kingdom and several lyngdohs from the villages; the Soh Blei is at their head, wearing a special sacrificial coat (cf. Fig. 4),[1] while the others wear everyday clothes. Each one carries a dish in his hand with some rice, pounded flour for kpu and rynsi, betel nuts and the pepper leaf that belongs with them, a small young hen, a water container, leaves of the Khasi oak tree, as well as a small gourd bottle with rice liquor. The dish and the water container of the sacrificial priests are of ornamented brass, those of the Soh Blei of silver -- all clean and polished until gleaming. 796 782

The spectators are arranged to the right and the left of the sacrificers, so that there is a wide alleyway open through the middle of the place to the gate of the board fence which surrounds the place and the iīng sād. Several men are constantly busy keeping the crowd within these bounds. No one may come in through the gate during the whole ceremony, because the god enters here during the sacrifice-therefore the broad path must be left open. If anyone should chance to wish to come in through the gate during the performance of the sacrifice, he is driven back with loud shouts. If he dared to come in anyway, in earlier times he would have been a child of death; now the fear of the English government might protect him to a certain extent, although this could hardly be an absolute guaranty of his life because of the religious excitement of the people. [688]

The twelve now squat down on the boards placed in front of the iīng sād, the Soh Blei in the middle. Behind them the S'iem sād sits alone on the steps which lead from the iīng sād to the place of the sacrifice. Somewhat further back sits the S'iem surrounded by his Mentris and relatives (cf. Fig 7).[1] The Soh Blei sets the example in all that follows; the others watch him and copy him. While each of the sacrificers slaughters only a small hen or a goat, the Soh Blei has

[1] [For illustrations, see category 116, pp 14-18 --- Analyst]

796 782 the right to kill two of them, since he sacrifices to the ka Blei long S'iem and to the u Blei Shillong at the same time.

Each one places the little liquor bottle on the little pile of earth in front of him. This also represents the altar. Then they take pepper leaves and oak leaves and place them in a certain pattern beside and on top of each other, pieces of betel nuts are placed on them, and the whole is strewn with rice, kpu flour and rynsi flour, while short prayers are murmured (cf. Fig. 1). Then follows the sacrifice of the little hens. The sacrificers each take one between both hands, murmuring soft prayers, then /899/ the head of the little animal is sprinkled with water and strewn with rice, kpu flour, and rynsi flour. Each one dips a kind of pocket knife in the water and then cuts through the throat of the chicken. The freshly flowing blood is allowed to drip on the altar -- the little pile of earth with the bottle of liquor and the leaves. Then the entrails are taken out of the animals in order to see whether god is favorable to them or is angry with them because of the sins and wickedness of men. The sacrificers hold them up high with their right hands and look at them carefully. A joyful "u bha! (it is good)" escapes their lips and spreads through the circle of spectators.

796 782 787 This observing of entrails (dykhot) occurs at all the sacrifices. Although there are many kinds of such auguries, the following are more or less the usual ones. The gullet of chicken is about in the middle between the neck and the stomach and shaped like a fork. The right prong is called u Blei (god), the left one u briu (man). First the rectum is looked at to see if it is empty or shows any symptoms of sickness or spots; in these cases the hen is not suitable for sacrifice. But even when everything is faultless, better signs are wanted. The forking mentioned above is looked at and the sacrificer, holding the intestines in his hand, begins the ceremony with the question: "Nga kylli nga byrthen da ka shat ka khan, ieng rangbah u briu, dem u Blei? (I ask and seek through the strewing and the oracle, does the man rise and god bow?)" With his other hand he throws a little rice on the forking of the gullet, and because of the convulsive twitching actually one part or the other does rise. If the "man" rises, it is a good sign since the opposite branching, the "god" then bows or stays still as a sign of agreement.

If the omens are unfavorable, then it must be determined by throwing /perhaps a misprint -- Einwerfen instead of Eierwerfen - egg throwing: tr./, why the god is angry and which sacrifice would be pleasing to him. Then the sacrifice begins again until the omens 796 reveal that the god is reconciled and propitiated.

782 Let us return to our Nongkrem Puja. After the observing of the

entrails of the hens is completed with good results, the main part of the ceremony begins. Goats are brought out of the inside of the iing sad and one is placed behind each of the sacrificers. This moment is captured in Fig. 1. The hens that have already been sacrificed and the other sacrificial objects that have been mentioned can be seen lying in front of the Soh Blei and the other sacrificial priests on the ground. The Soh Blei now takes a long knife (ka wait) between both flat outstretched hands and squatting speaks a prayer with bowed head. Fig. 3 shows various kinds of such knives; the smaller folding ones are the ones mentioned above in describing the killing of the hens.

Meanwhile a kind of looping plant is thrown around the neck of one of the goats; one the the people present pulls it into the middle of the place where it /facing p. 898. Fig. 8. Dance of the Khasi Girls in front of the iing sad. Two photographs by P. Frum. Stegmiller, S. D. S. Fig. 9. Women Khasi Dancers. Two photographs by P. Frum. Stegmiller, S. D. S. / /900/ is held fast by a rope. The Soh Blei gets up, walks up to the animal with the ka wait in his hand and waits for the instant when it holds still. With one blow the head lies on the ground. It is at once picked up and placed beside the gourd bottle standing on the little pile of earth. The twitching rump is dragged in front of the iing sad. Thus it continues until five goats are beheaded.

Now the S'iem comes down to the sacrificial place. He takes the slaughtering knife in his hand, squats down in the place of the head priest, and observes as the latter had done the same ceremonies. Then he gets up and strides into the middle of the place in full costume with raised head and a self-conscious dignity. A goat has already been lead out there. One blow and its head also rolls on the ground. He sacrifices the first goat to the divinity which made him king; afterwards the four others are sacrificed to the u Blei Shillong. A salvo of guns and a loud shout of joy accompanies each blow of the S'iem.

The slaughter is now continued by others in endless turns. Sixty, eighty and more goats must lose their lives. The poor victims are not always lucky enough to be killed with one blow. The animal might move at the last minute or an unskilled hand may lack a certain firmness. Then the goat is only lightly wounded and crying seeks to escape. The sacrificer throws the knife away in order to disappear hastily among the spectators; some pick up earth and throw it at him with reproachful cries, while others seize the poor animal, throw it on the ground and saw the head off with the knife. That is a horrible sight. It is considered an unfavorable sign when the goat is not

796 beheaded with one blow. If it happens to one of the first twelve goats,
782 the man concerned must inquire through new sacrifices why his sacri-
787 fice was not pleasing to god.

The observing of the entrails is only done with the twelve first goats decapitated by the S'iem and the sacrificial priests. As in the case of pigs, it is only observed whether the liver, lungs, spleen and gall bladder are healthy and without spots, in which case the sacrifice is a good one and pleasing to god; otherwise through throwing /sic: could be egg throwing = Eierwerfen/ and new sacrifices a more favorable result must be brought about.

During the night a pig is sacrificed to the honor of the u Suidnia long S'iem and he is informed thereby that Puja has now taken place and that it will take place once annually to the honor of the u Blei Shillong so that the kings will be lucky and healthy, the markets will enjoy progress and good results, and the children of the kingdom will be happy. This closes with the address to the Suidnia long S'iem: "Bring it about that the augury turns out well, and if the god Shillong should still not be satisfied, then reveal it to us through the augury."

The Soh Blei now takes a chicken in his hand, sprinkles it with water, rice, flour of kpu and rynsi and speaks: "Now thou art sprinkled in order to lose thy life by having thy neck cut so that I can see the good or the evil (La pynsum pynsleh ban duh ka mynsiem ban dykut u ryndang; ba ngan khmih ia ka bha ka sniw)." Then /901/ the animal s neck is cut, the blood, as mentioned above, is allowed to drip on the leaves and the gourd bottle, and the entrails are taken out. After the augury has turned out favorably, a white he-goat is brought in and the Soh Blei speaks: "O god Shillong, this prayer is for thee, this sacrifice of the goat, of the hen, of the kpu and rynsi, of the utensils of preparation are for thee which thou hast given the royal family so that once annually the Puja may be celebrated in thy name, so that we may live happily, be healthy and increase, so that kings will arise so that their honor and that of the kingdom will grow and increase and the children of the kingdom will spread out to increase thy name and thy honor. O god Shillong, when thou hast received the sacrifice, bring it about that the heart, the lungs, the spleen, the gall bladder and the other parts are good."

Meanwhile dancers are arranged on both sides; they swing the sword ( ka wait) and the bunch ( u symphiah) around in the air and utter shouts of joy. As mentioned above, the goat is now strewn three times with the various sacrificial gifts, and guns are shot off three times and shouts of joy uttered. Then the S'iem gets up, takes the ka wait in his hand and sits down on the place of sacrifice. He takes

off his turban (ka jain spong) and thanks god three times in a quiet voice; then he hands over the ka wait to the Soh Blei who does the same and then gives the knife to the sacrificer from the jaid Nongkseh, this one hands it on to the one from the jaid Thangkieu, and this one finally gives it to the one from the jaid Niangnong. Only one from these three families may undertake the beheading. When this has taken place, the head is placed on the leaves in front of the gourd bottle, and the entrails are taken from the body in order to read the omens. If these come out right, the dance of joy is set in motion. All members of the kingdom are invited to the feast, which consists of rice, sacrificial meat, and rice liquor and which lasts until early in the morning.

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III. The Celebration that Follows.

On the evening of the following day -- called mied Maulong -- a special meeting of the council takes place, which is called Dorbar sla in order to announce that all the sacrifices are now past. The S'iem has mats spread out inside the house and in the front room for the people to sit on; he himself takes his place on a palong, a raised seat, in the front room. Goat meat and pork is distributed to all those present, while the person who is designated as the speaker in the Dorbar and the first of the flute players receive betel nuts. The S'iem sends to the village and has it announced three times that as long as the Dorbar lasts nobody may leave his hut.

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Then he takes his turban off, raises both hands and offers thanks in the name of the lord and creator ( ha ka kyrteng u trai u nongthau), who made him king, gave him subjects as well as the districts of the kingdom, the markets and the roads leading thither and prays that he will ever give strength, growth and progress and prosperity to the fields. Then he cries /902/ out: "O god, lord and creator, give me, the S'iem, happiness and prosperity also, so that my thanks and submission to thee may become ever greater (Ah Blei, trai kynrad u nongthau u nongbuh to ai bha ai roi ia nga I S'iem ban nongkhrau ka nguh ka dem)." Then he steps back.

796 782

The one who has been made the speaker now follows from the jaid Rynjah. He thanks the S'iem three times and then says: "O lord, thou who hast created heaven and earth, thou hast seated the king that we may be children of his kingdom: thou hast given the sun and the moon for reckoning the year, so that we can have Puja once in every year, so that the king appears, the children of the valleys increase and thrive, the children of the Khasi (2), the children of the

2. That means the Khasi themselves.

● 781 782 Bhoi (3), the childrenof the War (3), so that the sacrificial gifts will

3. All various folk tribes which compose the kingdom Nongkrem.

increase before the face of thy altar (Ko trai ba thau ia ka bneng ka khyndew uba pynlong i S'iem i kynrad ba long ma ngi ki khun ki hajar kumba phi buh ka sngi ban khein ia u bnai, phi buh u bnai ban khein ka mem ban long ka puja shi sien shi mem ban im ban roi i S'iem ban roi ki khun dykhar, khun Bhoi, khun Bhoi, khun Khasi, khun War ban khrau u blang u bhet ha khmat ka duwan jong phi)."

Then the drum of joy (ksing risa) is beaten and everybody is given rice liquor, as much as he wants. The S'iem and the S'iem said eat of the inner parts of the entrails observed the day before. Music and dancing last the whole night long until early the next morning when the participants in the festival return again to their villages and their huts.

425 If after discussions lasting weeks all the problems involved have
613 been settled, the agreements decided on are finally completed with
the customary ceremonial. It was mentioned above, what objects
[778] for the religious cult are to be found in the hut of the clan mother.
The little basket plaited of bamboo cane, which is considered the
special seat of the divine ancestors of the clan, /Clan/ is not divided.
/309/ Another, similar basket is made. By sacrifice of goats and pigs,
these divinities are then entreated so that a part of them may take up
their dwelling in this basket for the protection of the newly constructed
clan. If the sacrificial priest can announce the agreement of the de-
ceased spirits with the division from the oracle of the entrails of the
animals and by egg throwing, then this basket is brought to the new
clan hut. On another day one of the two hazelnut poles is then taken
for the new hut with further sacrifices. Each of the two separated
parties must fetch a new pole to go with the other one. In a like way the
existent sacrificial utensils, such as rice baskets, mats, and gourd bot-
tles are divided. With this ceremony the agreements made about the
division of the other property are considered legally existent. Each party
now goes his own way independent of the other. Certain relationships of
[582] friendship and kinship still remain in existence; however, the bar to
marriage, which otherwise would make impossible the marriage between
members of the same family clan without regard to the degree of re-
lationship, is no longer in existence.

425 If, at the conversion of one part of the members of the clan to
797 the Christian religion, the division of property can be accomplished
• 776 legally, it is better to insist on it. The members who have become
Christian are more readily protected from disadvantageous treatment.
Even if they should take part of the fields for themselves in separate
management, the part of the clan that remained heathen could de-
mand this back years later. Enmity, hate, and revenge would
then follow. Without the formal ceremony combined with the
sacrifices mentioned a Khasi does not recognize a division as
legal. Since Christians cannot participate in such a sacrificial
ceremony, there is nothing to do other than to have this ceremony
undertaken while those seeking to be baptized are still catechumens.
Before they are accepted then into the church by baptism, the
heathen cult objects that were brought into the clan hut must be re-
moved. "To /310/ this most important ceremony, "the missionary
of the Syntang territory, P. Benedikt Naher S.D.S., once related,
"I usually went myself if it was possible for me to or sent a European
sister of the Order. Thereby the ceremony acquired a great deal
[[see category file, pp 4.5 — Analyst]]

more solemnity and had a powerful effect on the heathen and the catechumens. The basket of the gods, the two sticks, the gourd bottles, and the other objects of the cult were carried to an open place in front of the hut, placed on a pile of bamboo canes and wood and then lighted by fire. The heathen stood at a respectful distance, fearful and trembling, and expecting that the gods would revenge themselves and destroy me with fire from heaven. But nothing of the kind happened, and disappointed and thoughtful they went back to their huts. The clan hut would then be blessed and sprinkled with holy water."

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In general the Christian religions strive to settle their members in a village separated from the heathen clan members, and to settle them in such a way that the separate family clans remain together when possible. The christian customs, that husband, wife, and children then live together in one family is carried out when possible but, however it is not always done without difficulties in view of the traditional customs.

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of a clan some ceremonial attachment developed out of the custom of depositing the bones of the clansmen in clan ossuary and renewing the relationship between the clansmen on the ceremonial occasion of *thaphmaubah* when the bones were finally transferred from *mawshieng* (ossuary of a sub-clan) to *mawbah* (ossuary of a clan).

Social bond among the clansmen is due to the performance of common religious ceremonies (*khur*), worship of common deities and spirits of household (*Kawiduia*), water (*pawi*) and hills (*Kawidhum*) and observance of mourning for three days for the death of clansmen with the cessation of outdoor work specially with implements.

Economic bond among them is due further to the possession of common land (*ri-khar*), which is divided into separate holdings held by families.

**Sub-clan** (*Ka-k'pen*)—Unlike the clan, sub-clan has nothing to do with the regulation of marriage. Its main functions are socio-religious. Mutual interest in the welfare of the members of sub-clan evinced in the observance of *adhum** in honour of the dead grandmother, profound sentiment grown out of the former practice of depositing the bones of the dead persons of the same sub-clan in *mawshieng* and the responsibility of bearing the expenses for *thaphmaubah* bind the members together.

The observance of mourning on the death of a person of the same sub-clan for three days and the consequent

*Offering of food to the spirits of the dead ancestors.

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God or Goddess, deities regarded as helpful to living and prosperity, producing fertility, and in an Khasi of the kind are no longer practised, except for the Rishaphlieng ceremony designed to protect the [illegible] the village of Jowai. Finally, the main religion of many christians was expressed in one great ceremony per year which was intended to secure material blessing for a chief and his lineage, and, through this, for the entire chiefdom. The notable example still practised, is the Pomblang feasts of Khynriam chiefdom. [illegible] Lyngdoh 1957, 1960, Gregerson 1980b, Becker 1981). Illness and misfortune, in view of its cause, a Khasi calls in a specialist, and possibly also a medicine man. The medicine man is an ordinary individual who has let upon some herbal remedy to one or more ailments, who has become famous enough to be sought out and rewarded in cash, and who jealously guards the formula of his medicine until it dies with him. He and his patients used a regard him as specially blessed. Khasi, death, and afterlife. The universe is composed of a heaven, the earth, and the air between. Heaven is where the souls of deceased mortals live in eternal peace, grouped ab by ab. The earth and all nature were created by God, and everything that God created has its own individual soul. There is no other good earth deity, for it was God who created the earth. The air is inhabited by the wandering souls of those dead for whom full death rites were not performed. A Khasi's potentiality for enjoying an afterlife in heaven with his ancestors depends on his receiving proper death rites at the hands of his ab nurse. First, his body is consumed by his children, notably his youngest daughter, and his bones are collected and deposited temporarily in a small stone receptacle. All work stops in the village while everyone participates in the funeral. Once every several years, an entire ab gathers to witness the transfer of the bones of recently deceased ab mates from their temporary receptacles to the great ab vats that is in the keeping of the youngest daughter, descended from the ab ancestress through a line of youngest daughters. The final ceremony covers five days, and is elaborate and expensive, but when an individual's bones are finally resting with those of his antecedents in the vats, it is understood that his soul is finally in heaven, "resting held out in the house of God."

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# THE KHASI FESTIVAL OF 'POMBLANG'

S. Banerjee

## Introduction

The Khasi inhabit the upland of the central part of the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills district of Assam. They reckon descent through mother and the youngest daughter (Ka khadduh) of the house is the custodian of the ancestral property. Belief in the existence of spirits is strong among them and the causes of diseases are ascertained by taking recourse to the process of divination. They are ruled by different categories of Chief. The *Siem* is the highest official responsible for the administration of the state but a few small states are also governed by *Syndars* with same powers as vested in the former although does not possess the same status. It is interesting to note that their principal whose rank is next to *Siem*, have also been allotted to perform this secular duties in some of the regions of the Khasi country. The Chief functions through their respective council comprising elected members from different administrative units. He is rather subservient to this body as he is liable to be censured or even dismissed, if his activities are not in conformity with the Khasi traditional usage. Most of his directives are implemented through the assistance of his subordinates who are in-charge of various sections of the State. The Khasi place his grievance first to these junior officers for redress and justice, after which an appeal can be preferred to the *Siem* or any other higher officer as the case may be. One of the eminent States of the Khasi people known as Khyriem, where this festival is celebrated, consists of eight units for administrative convenience under the supervision of different grades of officials who participated in this celebration along with the Siem as representatives of the people.

The Khasi festival of *Pomblang* (Goat killing) described below used to be celebrated at one time in Shillong when the Khasi states of Khyriem and Mylliem were not separated. The first chief of the Khyriem state U Singh Manik, shifted his headquarters to Nongkrem village after partition of the kingdom, which occured before the arrival of the British. He again moved to Laitkorkhem after a brief stay at the village of Lyngkhim. He performed this festival as long as he was there, transferring it again to Nongkrem where he re-settled again. It was celebrated here for a long time and consequently it was named after this village. Although the ruling family had later on shifted its residence about sixty years ago to the present village Smit, during the time of U Khar Singh, Siem, it is performed regularly as *Nongkrem dance* which was observed by the author from 21st June to 25th June, 1955.

## Object of the festival

It is being held every year since the days of U Shillong who was supposed to be the founder of original Khyriem State. They celebrate it to perpetuate his memory and pay homage with a view to ensure rain, good harvest, eliminating diseases and famine. He was worshipped along with other ancestors with view to guide the present Chief in his discharge of his duties and for the welfare of the people.

The house of Siem (*Ing-mei*) where the rites are observed, is considered sacred. It consists of a big hall (*shyllong*) in the centre, surrounded by rooms. One of these on the north is used as a kitchen room (*ing-shet-pa*) where ritual

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objects are stored while that of the west (kynram blang) was meant exclusively for sacrificial goats. There is a very big circular courtyard in front of the building where the members of the royal family as also other boys and spinsters hold a ritual dance. The function is always held during the moonlit period of May or June and the actual dates are fixed in consultation with the Chief priest (*Sohblei*) in such a way that the first day—*Pamtiah** always coincides with the market day of Shillong Chota Bazar. The dates of the festival is then communicated to the in-charge of different units of his territory, through a wooden stick '*kyrwah*' having a few knots of cane-strips, as a form of summons for attending the festival for five days at Smit along with subjects under their jurisdiction.

### Important Participant

The responsibility of performing this ritual rests on the High-priestess (*Ka Siem Sad*) who is succeeded by her eldest daughter. Different ritual objects are procured by her, well in advance and it is obligatory on her part to join the ceremonial dancing, in which her daughter may also officiate on her behalf. U Shillong is worshipped by the chief priest while the other ancestors are invoked by lesser priests. The musicians (*Dhulia*) besides their normal duties, take part in the worship of the ancestors and they are presented with silk turban, jacket, cloth, by the ruling family for the services rendered during the festival. The *Siem* has no especial role except to supervise and evoke U Shillong for the welfare of the community. He is required to perform certain sacrifices, failing which his heir-apparent (*Siem kynnah*) does the same. He along with his sister (High priestess) abstain from taking rice during the period of celebration presumably to observe the sanctity of this festival as also to ensure the successful conclusion of the function.

### Ritual Materials

The festival derives its name from the sacrifice of a large number of goats some of which were supplied from the State fund and from different units of the territory. Formerly at least fifty goats were required and each unit had a specific allotment but owing to the economic difficulty that the Khasi are experiencing, the number of goats sacrificed hardly exceeds twenty-five. The goats collected from the different units, are presented to the Chief at the midnight of the third day. Rice-beer, dried fish, fermented-rice, betel leaves together with nuts are also important ritual objects in this celebration.

### Description of the Festival

The commencement of the festival was marked by the distribution of dried, fish (suit dokha) to the persons assembled on the occasion, in the evening of *Pamtiah* (*i.e.* 21st June, 1957). This was followed by the dropping of rice-beer by the Chief priest over the fire place of central hall known as *Ka suit-ka shor*

*A week consists of eight days in Khasi Calendar the names are according to the places where markets are held in Khasi Hills.

| Name | Market |
|---|---|
| 1. Pamtiah | Shillong Chota Bazar. |
| 2. Umni | Cherrapunji. |
| 3. Yer-dah | Shillong Burra Bazar. |
| 4. Lyngba | Barapani. |
| 5. Nongkrem | Nongkrem. |
| 6. Mawlong | Laban (Shillong). |
| 7. Nyngkong | Cherrapunji Chota Bazar. |
| 8. Shillong | Laitkyrg Park. |

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in which no sacrifice was made except this libation of this liquor in the name of U Shillong, Ka Blei Long Siem and U Suidnia. Subsequently, the Chief musician (Dhulia) worshipped another deity Ka Synchar, by holding a yellow cook in front of ritual offerings collected on a plantain leaf while his subordinates immediately shouted nine times in their traditional way. Redistribution of dry-fish and indigenous liquor to the people marked and the end of the first day and the ceremonies performed on this day were repeated on the second day (Umni).

The sacrifice of goats which was an important feature of the festival, was performed in the afternoon of the third day (Yew duh) on the top of an adjacent hill where the *Siem* along with other members of his house, went there in a procession. The people shouted all the time while it was proceeding to that place. The musicians went round the altar first at the top of the hill thrice in anticipation of a happy and good auguers. The Chief priest facing the north, prayed to U Shillong holding a red-coloured cock in his right hand and killed it on the altar collecting its blood in a gourd vessel. The entrails of the cock were carefully examined by him and then kept on a silver plate. The Chief priest threw some grains of rice before him as also over the yellow goat and prayed to U Shillong holding a *dah* in his hand. He then passed on this implement to the *Siem* who also prayed to the deity. The *Siem* handed over the same to a man (nengnong) who sacrificed the goat on behalf of the *Siem*. He collected nine pieces of meat from different parts of the goats body (*e.g.* heart, lungs, liver, stomach, kidney, etc.) and handed them over to the priest. The latter cut each piece of the meat into five parts and offered them to the five ancestors.* The procession returned to the Siem's residence when the head of the goat was brought back by a member of a Kharbamen clan. It was then given to the High-priestess for disposal of the same in a manner as she liked. The day's rituals were completed by performing the goat presentation ceremony in the midnight. The Chief musician stood very near the fire made in this occasion at the verhandah (tyngkong) of the building and called the names of different units to present their gifts, in order of their seniority. The gathering that was watching from the courtyard shouted in their traditional way three times on receipt of the *Siem's* acceptance and the animals were led to the *kynram-blang* for overnight stay before which they were not considered fit to be sacrificed to be held on the day next.

On the evening of the fourth day (Lyngka) betel leaves and nuts were presented to the members of the *Siem's* family by the people wishing them happiness and prosperity. The chief priest took his seat in front of the verhandah in a line along with his ten assistants who were on either side in a group of five facing the north. The Chief priest worshipped U Blei Shillong and Ka Blei-Long Siem and the responsibility of invoking each ancestor or ancestress was devolved on each assistant priest :

| Asstt. Priest | Chief Priest | Asstt. Priest |
|---|---|---|
| 1. U Dienger.<br>2. U Marshan.<br>3. U Ram Shillong.<br>4. Ka Phan Siem Shillong.<br>5. U Biskorom. | 6. U Shillong.<br>7. Ka Blei Long Siem. | 8. U Phan Kynthei.<br>9. U Shyrwang.<br>10. Ka Lei Duwan.<br>11. Ka Siem Sngi.<br>12. Ka Blei Synchar. |

* (1) U Blei Shillong (2) U Suidnia (3) U Kpa & U Kha
(4) U Bhakraw Basaw (5) U Bakri Shako

After Lingdoh H.—The Pombleng Nongkrem (in Khasi) 1946. Khasi & Jaintia Hills Press, Shillong.

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The goats were sacrificed by his sister's eldest son (*Siem-khynnah*) and in charge of respective units at the open courtyard. The priests evoked the ancestors and ancestress and called upon them by name praying 'Oh God and Goddess, I offer this sacrifice as our ancestors did. Bless the *Siem*, his family and the people of his state. I shall beseech you again on this day after one year. You create favourable weather by virtue of your power, bring clouds and rains to yield bumper crops and ensure a happy and prosperous life.'

On the last day (Nongkrem), a man of Mawroh clan sacrificed a pig introducing an iron spike in its left armpit. Nine pieces of meat from different parts of the pig's body were again offered to their five ancestors. The *Siem* in the presence of his *Darbar* performed the last item of festival by praying to U Shillong, when the Chief of Rynjah clan also followed in the same way for seeking the blessings of their Chief deity.

This brought the ritual to an end performed at the residence of *Siem*. The five pieces of goat's and pig's meat offered to their five ancestors, were then handed over to the in-charge of the five units considered as somewhat higher in their State organisation. They distributed them at a suitable place in their unit, making a feast as a sort of public declaration of the completion of their greatest festival for the year.

## DANCING

Besides the ritual described above, dance with the accompaniment of music formed an important aspect of this festival. A dance known as *sad-tyngkoh* had been a regular feature for the first, second, third and fifth day. This dance has some interesting features. It has to be performed in pairs. The first pair was constituted by Chief priest and the Chief musician. Second to fifth pairs were between the Sirdars of the eight units after which *Siem* along with an official of his council constituted the sixth pair. The subsequent pairs were formed by any two persons from the gathering. They danced only after bowing first before the Oak pillar (Rishot), then to *Siem* on the fifth day. This pairing was then not adhered to on completion of the last rite of the festival.

A second type of dance (*Ka sad mastieh*) was then performed in the courtyard by the musicians as well as by the professional dancers (nong-shad) with sword and fly-brush in the afternoon of the third day. The dance was always held in pairs first by musicians, and then dancers, who donned their traditional dress consisting of silk turban (Jainspong) decorated with feathers, coloured sleeveless coat (Jymphong) silver chains and coral necklaces. Later on they joined the procession, that went to the adjacent hill where after the completion of the ceremony of goat killing, a group dance was performed returning to the residence of *Siem* ultimately.

This dance (*sad-nohkjat*) was performed by the Siems family. It was held early in the morning of the fourth day in the central hall (Shlur) and also in the courtyard. The men put on their normal dress whereas the women dressed themselves with gold and silver crown (pansngiat), numerous silver ornaments and different coloured blouse. They dressed and braided the hairs into a knot just at the nape. The High Priestess who also danced with the membes of the Siems' family, stood in the middle of the line and chief musician stood at one end. They hold each other in hand and danced round the fire-place of the central hall (Shlur) in anti-clock-wise direction in accompaniment of music. The people assembled there, gave vent to their feeling in their customary way every time, before they resumed to make it three times. Similar performance of dances were also held in the courtyard.

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Then followed the dance of the girls (*Ki shad kynthei*) who were also wearing dress as described above. They kept their eyes down, keeping their arms on their sides taking such a short steps with the music, that the movement of the feet were hardly perceptable. The boys were also in their dancing dress as worn by *nongshad* and danced with fly-brush round the girls making their steps with the beatings of the drums. The music started from the morning would be stopped only after completion of the dance which prolonged till evening. These functions served as a good source of amusement to the people, enabling them to have a good diversion from their monotonous life with an opportunity to meet their friends and relations who assembled there from different parts of the hill.

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## DISCUSSION

From the fore-going description, it is evident that the Khasi live in a democratic set up in which the secular duties are entrusted to the *Siem*. A different rule is followed in the case of religious festivals. Every Khasi family entrusts the sacredotal work of the house to the youngest daughter. The *Siem's* sister (Siem Sad) being the nearest member of his mother's clan, is made responsible for the observance of those ceremonies which concerns the welfare of the subjects. The people attend the festival to seek blessings of their supreme deity U Shillong and their presence in the *Siem's* residence indicates their loyalty to him. The rituals of the festival, instead of being performed by her (High Priestess), were conducted by the Chief Priest (Soh blei) for which he was allotted a very imporatnt position in the celebration. The musicians were given similar status owing to the belief in the sacredness of their music. It ought to be played in proper tunes otherwise the displeasure of the deity would fall on them on finding any slight departure in this respect. For this reason, the music is considered as important as the rituals and the role of musicians were consequently given due recognition at every stage of the festival. The tradition of deputing one person of Nengnong clan to sacrifice the goat at the top of the hill was followed on account of their ancestors having carried out in olden times the profession of side-de-camp (body guard) to the *Siem*. Another person of kharbamen clan was also asked to carry the head of the sacrificial animal from the hill to the residence of the *Siem* after the worship, as his predecessors were serfs in ancient times during the period of their captivity in this State. Such incidents were found expressed in a symbolic way through their ceremonies.

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The most important concern of the people was to maintain their mode of living together with their property and other means of subsistence. They worshipped him so that he might prevent the evil spirits from doing any harm and may in addition grant them bumper crops. To be recipient of such a favour, they appeased their god U Shillong with gifts and sacrifices. It is not sure whether he is considered as one of their deified ancestors but his important position in the Khasi pantheon enabled him to have some priority in their worship. The offering of red-cock together with a yellow goat, moreover, revealed his amiable and benevolent nature as the malignant ones get representation invariably with black colours. U Shillong was invoked simultaneously with other dead ancestors, with this hope, that all the deities would pool their supernatural strength in fighting the evil spirits before the latter were able to cause any harm to their crops or to reduce in any way the fertility of their fields.

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It would be interesting to refer here about the presentation of nine pieces of meat from various parts of the sacrificial animal. It may be a case of appeasement by serving him with some food but there seems to be something

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796 782 769 776 182 magical in such gifts. The khasi deities being souls of departed members, are anthropomorphic in nature, have all the qualities of an ordinary human being. The worshippers believe that the deities may also loose their strength in course of time which can be augmented only by offering suitable sacrifices. They presented pieces of meat to transfer in them the supernatural 'power' which are concentrated or lodged in those regions of the sacrificial animal, from where they were taken out. It is a case of reciprocal help between the deity and the devotee so that on attaining their normal strength, they would fulfil their request.

796 769 182 The Khasi people while participating in the celebration gave vent to their emotion through their traditional cries. It could not be definitely established whether these were any indication of frightening the evil spirits but on the other hand, those were intended to cheer the *Siem*, musicians, and the respective units taking parts in the celebration. The musicians on another occassion, went round the altar three times on reaching the top of the hill. The [644] [801] members of the *Siem's* house similarly performed a sacred dance round the fire place of central hall (Shlur) to the same number of times. This odd number of three seemed to be an auspicious one. The exact cause for such a reverential attitude to this figure may be to pay respect to their primal ancestress (Ka Iawbei), her husband (U Thawlang) and her brother, *i.e.*, first maternal uncle (U Suidnia) who are considered highest amongst all the Khasi deities.

796 535 182 The dancing is generally taken as secular part of religious function, but the Khasi people considered them (except the last one) as sacred for the reason that it is one of their methods of propitiating their deity. The people at times, ascribe certain meanings to them to rationalise their thinking. The dancing invariably put the participants into ecstasy to enable them to be in communion with their supernatural beings, yet those are interpreted as a device to control the spirits inspite of its calm and quiet nature. The people even then enjoyed them with this hope that these would prevent the intruding spirits from spreading diseases. Owing to the fixation of the dates of the function at the time of sowing period, the dance of the unmarried girls may have some bearing on the promotion of fertility of the soil. The custom of allowing Khasi boys to dance round the spinsters with fly-flap in one of their hands may be to protect them from the influence of the evil spirits.

The heads of the various units adhered to the official precedence strictly before they allowed a common man to take part in the dancing. The custom of allowing two officials to dance, at a time, was in recognition to their equal status. It had become a practice to follow at every stage of their function. The presence of all the in-charge of this Siemship were essential to secure the blessings of their deity on behalf of his subjects whom they represent in official capacity in this festival. This is a suitable mechanism to foster unity and solidarity among the people of the different units which is the main aim of this celebration. This was found to be so when Khasi people from all parts of State were seem witnessing the dancing of the unmarried girls. The informant on being asked to state the reason of permitting the spinsters only in this dance, came out with an interesting fact about the ancient Khasi tradition. The dance used to offer at one time, an opportunity to the youngmen of the Royal families in selecting their brides. A betel leaf with a nut were usually thrown at a girl and the men going round them, remained as witness of this incident. This explanation received some support from the frequent utterances (*rong-rong*) by the public, expressing a desire to run away with a girl dancing with graceful style.

796 182 The celebration can be taken up as a solidarity rite. The performance is all the more essential for the purpose of security without which the people

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would not be in a position to divert their attention to the problems of basic amenities and other necessaries in their life. This is expressed through rituals which are maintained through tradition and transmitted from generation to generation. A proper performance of the ritual ensures prosperity.

The maternal uncle occupies a very important position in the social life of the Khasi community. He acts as a manager of the family and his opinion is always sought for in any matter of social implications. He is thus honoured and respected by all the members of the house. In spite of the matrilineal set up of their society, the men are given honourable position in the affairs of the family. Their role has been given due recognition in their various customs and rites. The uncle (mother's brother) as also husbands in some exceptional cases, are always remembered by the living members of the house for their wisdom and sagacity. They are thus deified and are prayed by them to bestow all possible help to tide over their period of crisis. The Khasi pantheons to whom the people in general pay due reverence, are considered to have led similar life as prevelent in their present society. Thus the various rites and ceremonies that are observed, expressing clearly the duties, nature and obligations for these deities, are simply a reflection of the Khasi way of life. The general pattern of social structure has been found to be projected unconsciously through their religious worship and these celebrations are of course of great value to the local inhabitants as it re-inforces certain cultural features so characteristic of this tribe.

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burning the dead in the immediate neighbourhood of the village of Jowái. Suspicions of insurrection arose during the months of October and November 1861. In the beginning of January 1862 alarming reports were received from various quarters, and the first serious outbreak occurred on the 17th of that month. This was occasioned by the interference of a *dárogá*, or native police official, with a religious ceremony that took place at the village of Jalong. In such ceremonies dancing with arms is held essential; and the *dárogá* took upon himself to disarm the dancers. This was the signal for a general rising. The *thánd* or police station at Jowái was burned to the ground; the garrison of sepoys was besieged, and all show of British authority was swept away throughout the Hills. The Syntengs fought bravely for their independence, and at first were successful in cutting off several small detachments of police and sepoys. Their weapons were bows and arrows. In common with the other hill tribes of the North-East Frontier, their chief defence consisted in a series of strong stockades, one behind another; and the paths leading to their villages were thickly planted with *pánjis*, or little bamboo spikes, stuck in the ground like caltrops. The battalion of sepoys stationed in the Hills was rendered inefficient by sickness. At last it was found necessary to move a regular army, including an elephant battery and two regiments of Sikhs, into the country in order to quell the revolt. Colonel Dunsford was in chief command. He was accompanied by Major Haughton, the Governor-General's Agent on the North-East Frontier, and Captain Morton, the Deputy-Commissioner of the Khási and Jáintiá Hills, who acted in a political capacity. The operations were tedious and harassing. The rebel chiefs were captured one by one, and the District was declared to be finally pacified in March 1863, after the rebellion had lasted for fifteen months. The special Commission appointed under Act xi. of 1857, for the trial of offenders in the Jáintiá Hills, was dissolved in December 1863. The causes of the rebellion were thus summed up by Major Haughton in an official despatch to the Government of Bengal:—

'Taxation was introduced without the supervision with which such a measure should have been accompanied. It was followed up by fresh taxation and rumours of other taxes, also by fiscal and other innovations, which tended to disturb the minds of the people, without any counterpoise such as might have resulted from the continued presence of a European officer.' The Syntengs, like the